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NEW-YORK
EVENING TALES:
OR
UNCLE JOHN'S TRUE STORIES

ABOUT
Natural History.

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NUMBER THREE.

—◆—
BY THE AUTHOR OF
"Green Mountain Annals,"—"Christmas Token."
—◆—

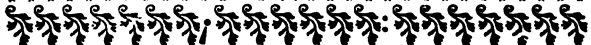
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FRONTISPIECE.



TIGER HUNTING IN SOUTH AMERICA.



NEW-YORK
EVENING TALES:
OR
UNCLE JOHN'S TRUE STORIES
ABOUT
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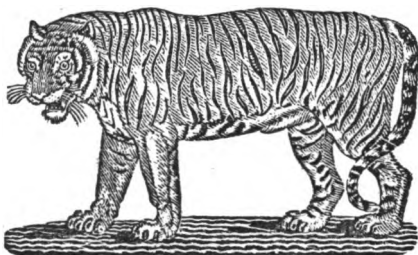


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1833.

NEW-YORK EVENING TALES.



THE TIGER.

WELL, my children : here you are again, and a good company of you too. What are you after now ?

“ The stories ! the *true* stories ! We can’t go any where about the streets, among our mates, but what we hear something said about the *true stories*. They say, too, that a book-maker, who makes a great many little books for children, down in Pearl-street, has got hold of your stories, and is printing them in a book. They say, too, that

he has found means to put down, not only all you say, Uncle John, but he is printing some queer things which the children have said to you."

Ha, ha, ha ! I'm glad to hear it. I am certain I have told you no stories but what I am willing all the world should read. You, certainly, have said nothing here that would look foolish in print. I wish all children before they speak, would only think how what they were going to say would appear, if it should be printed.

You are good children, and now quite still—so I will tell you about the Tiger.

This bold and terrible animal is the only one who dares to fight with the Lion. The Royal Tiger of Bengal, in the East Indies, will sometimes succeed in conquering and killing the king of beasts. They are shaped something like a cat—have a horrid looking mouth and strong jaws, with huge claws. Their eyes are too fierce and angry to look upon.

181935

In the East Indies they have fine sport, although it is dangerous, in hunting the tiger. The men who hunt them are mounted on large elephants, armed with rifles. But sometimes the battle will be so bloody, and the tiger will leap upon the elephants with such fury as to drive them all away in confusion, and the riders on the elephants may think themselves happy to come off without torn and mangled limbs.

In the picture which I now show you, the manner of hunting the tiger in South America, is seen. Hunting the tiger is one of the favorite diversions of the Guanches, a native tribe of Paraguay, distinguished by their singular courage and activity. The deserts they inhabit are much infested by wild beasts, among which the tiger holds the first place; but he has a formidable enemy in the Guanche, who, with his *lazo*, a long rope with a noose, never fails to overcome him. The

Guanches are very fond of riding, and pride themselves on their skill in breaking in their steed. The plains through which they wander contain an immense quantity of horses and wild mules. Mounted on their well-trained couriers, the Guanches dart on a troop of wild horses, the *lazo* is thrown, and one is caught. The Guanche, who now dismounts, whirls another *lazo* round his captive, who becomes completely entangled : then, without stirrups or bridle, and merely with spurs and words of command, the Guanche masters the impatient animal, which paws the ground and darts away with the rapidity of lightning. Indignant at his burden, he stops, prances and rolls in the dust, and the Guanche rolls along with him. He then darts off again, and, in order to terrify his adversary, who still keeps his seat, traverses rocks, clears precipices, and swims the streams. At length, worn

out with fatigue, he falls and submits to the bridle. But it is not enough that the horse becomes obedient and transports his master from one country to another, he must also brave the same dangers with him, and second him in his boldest attacks, even on a tiger, at the mere sight of which almost every animal takes to flight. To the horse in his wild state, the appearance of a tiger is peculiarly terrific; yet this noble animal is here brought to look his foe in the face, and not to run away until a certain signal is given.

When the Guanche goes to hunt the tiger, he does not take the smallest supply of provisions, although he traverses immense barren plains, which produce nothing but a few stalks that serve for the nourishment of cattle.

When the Guanche is hungry he seeks after a herd of wild horses, catches one of them with his *lazo*, and throwing the animal down, cuts off a

piece of his flesh with a knife, and restores him to liberty. He quenches his thirst at a spring, and then begins his chase after wild beasts. The hoarse roar of the tiger soon informs him of his prey; he spurs his horse forward towards the monster he intends for a victim; when he meets with him he stands, and then a terrible combat ensues.

The Guanche whirls his *lazo*; he speaks, he calls aloud, he is ready for his enemy—his terrible enemy, who, with his belly almost touching the ground, is astonished to see any being awaiting his approach, and provoking him: his eyes roll furiously, he opens his vast jaws, still red with the blood of his last victim, and indignant at finding an opponent, he seeks with his eye for the place on which he intends to spring. The Guanche is all the time, fierce, prudent, and tranquil, governing his astonished but obedient courser with his feet; he makes him retreat

without turning his face from the tiger, who follows him step by step, watching for a false movement. The Guanche knows this; he makes his horse rear up; the tiger darts forward and is caught; the horse springs away on his hind legs with all his power, dragging the ferocious beast after him. The Guanche sometimes turns round, and if his *lazo* has only caught the neck of the tiger, he flings a second, which binds the legs. He now dismounts, arms himself with the two knives which he carries in his boots, and butchers the now helpless tiger.

If in the combat with the tiger, it happen that the *lazo* has missed, which is very seldom the case, the horse sees the danger of his master, and presents his own chest to the enemy. His blood flows, but his courage never for one moment forsakes him—he knows that his rider will stand by him. If the tiger, exhausted by fa-

tigue, allows the horseman a single moment, it is all over with him ; the *lazo* again is thrown, and the beast is caught.

I have another wonderful account which is well authenticated, of a she tiger in the Desert of Arabia.

A French soldier was once taken captive by a company of Maugrabins in the Desert of Arabia. He effected an escape ; but his horse falling dead under him, he toiled on through the sands, till he came to a clump of palm trees. Beneath their grateful shadow he fell asleep ; but was soon awakened by the moaning of some huge animal near him. He looked and saw an immense female Panther, or Tigress, sleeping most profoundly. She soon awoke, and, instead of rending him to pieces, fawned upon him and exhibited the utmost tenderness. She became very fond of him, and would never remain absent from him longer than was

necessary to obtain food. For many days he subsisted on such wild fruit as he could find. The tigress at length became so enamored of the soldier, that she grew jealous upon small occasions ; on one of these she scratched him so severely as to draw blood. This so excited his apprehensions of danger, that he plunged his dagger into the creature's spine. She fell down dead. Shortly after, a merehant's caravan found the captive weeping over the body of the slaughtered tigress.

Far o'er the desert's sandy bed,
The self-freed captive swiftly fled.
No foam is on his naked steed ;
Without a rein or spur he flies.

A passing merchant's caravan
Beheld a pale, half-famished man
Sitting upon the burning sand,
Beside the slain and horrid form
Of a huge Tigress—in his hand
He grasps a blade with blood yet warm,
Hot tears are coursing down his cheek,
And when he sees the wondering eyes
Around him—he essays to speak,
But shows no joy, or glad surprise,—
“I slew her—would that I had died
For thee, my noble Desert Bride !”

“Go on—go on, Uncle John; we never heard such good stories before. Oh, can’t you tell us something more about the tiger—it is so delightful!”

My good little fellow, I will tell you something about the Sea Tiger. This is a fierce looking monster of the deep, which bears a strong resemblance to the land tiger, in the head and upper part of the body, while the tail is like that of a fish.

The sealing schooner Pacific arrived in the harbor of Portsmouth, N. H., a few months since, and brought the skull and hide of a sea tiger, taken near the South Georgia Islands. The brave tenant of the deep measured seven feet in length, and girted three and a half feet when killed. The general shape of the head is like that of the common seal, with the exception that it is longer, and the sockets of the eyes deeper and broader. The number of teeth is thirty-two—four of —

which are tusks. The largest tusk is an inch and a quarter long, and one inch in circumference at its base. In each jaw there are ten grinders. The skin is covered with fine, thick, short hair, of a grey color on the back, and spotted with black and white on the belly. It has short strong flippers. The sea tiger moves with surprising velocity in the water, and all its motions in that element are indicative of great strength.

Its principal food is penguins; and when a flock of these beautiful birds is discovered at a distance, he gets upon the windward side, lies upon his back, and in this attitude he suffers himself to ride upon the billows with his head slightly elevated above his body—keeping his large, dark, vigilant eye, steadily fixed upon the ill-fated object of his pursuit; and as soon as he has floated sufficiently near to secure it, he turns upon his belly, cleaves the billow with

astonishing swiftness, and the next moment he is seen plunging into the water with a penguin which weighs forty or sixty pounds, in his capacious jaws. He is an animal of undaunted courage and shrewdness.

The crew of the Pacific were frequently chased by sea tigers while they were cruising in their boats. On one occasion, when two of the men were at a considerable distance from the shore and from the schooner, a tiger nearly twenty feet long, and six feet in circumference, discovered their situation, and immediately pursued the boat with all possible speed. When he got within ten or twelve feet he leaped for the boat, at the same time exposing his teeth with great rage : but failing to get in the boat, he made a furious attempt to upset it. At this moment one of the party lodged a musket ball into his body ; but this only served to augment the animal's fury, and he again

attempted to spring into the boat ; and had it not been that he received a severe blow from a lance, would have succeeded. He still kept up battle with unabated courage and violence ; repeated his efforts, and seemed resolved that neither the power nor the weapons of man should prevail against him ; and it was not till the second and the third ball were lodged within him that he was overcome.

I have now told you an abundance about the tiger, and as I like to gratify such good children, I will now show you the picture of a grand serpent.

**COBRA-CAPELLO.**

This fearful looking serpent lives in South Africa. He is called the Cobra-Capello, or Hooded Snake. This serpent is exceedingly fierce and active, and sometimes, it is said, attains the formidable length of ten feet. The Cobra has been known to spring at a man on horseback, and to dart himself with such force as to overshoot his aim.

A traveller in South Africa makes the following statement:—

During a residence of six years in the interior of the Cape Colony, and in the course of various journeys through the interior, (extending to upwards of three thousand miles,) I have met with a considerable number of snakes; yet I do not recollect of ever being exposed, except in one instance, to any imminent hazard of being bit by

any of them. On the occasion referred to, I was attending to some Hottentots, whom I had hired to clear away a patch of thicket, when one of the men, suddenly recoiling, with signs of great alarm, exclaimed that there was a Cobra-Capello in the bush. Not being at that time fully aware of the dangerous character of this species of snake, I approached to look at him. The Hottentots called out to me to take care, for he was going to spring. Before they had well spoken, or I had caught a view of the reptile, I heard him hiss fiercely, and then dart himself towards me amidst the underwood. At the same instant, instinctively springing backward to avoid him, I fell over a steep bank into the dry stony bed of a torrent; by which I suffered some severe bruises, but fortunately escaped the more formidable danger to which I had too incautiously exposed myself. The Hottentots then assailed the snake with sticks and stones, and forced him (though not before he had made another spring and missed one of them still more narrowly than myself) to take refuge up a mimosa tree. Here he became a safe and easy mark to their missiles, and was speedily beaten down, with a broken back, and consequently rendered incapable of farther mischief. The Hottentots having cut off his head, carefully buried it in the ground, a practice which they never omit on such occasions, and which arises from their apprehension of some one incautiously treading on the head of the dead snake, and sustaining injury from its fangs; for they believe that the deathful virus, far from being extinguished with life, retains its fatal energy for weeks, and even months afterwards. This snake measured nearly six feet in length, and was the largest Cobra I have met with.

It is well known that the Bushmen, a tribe of

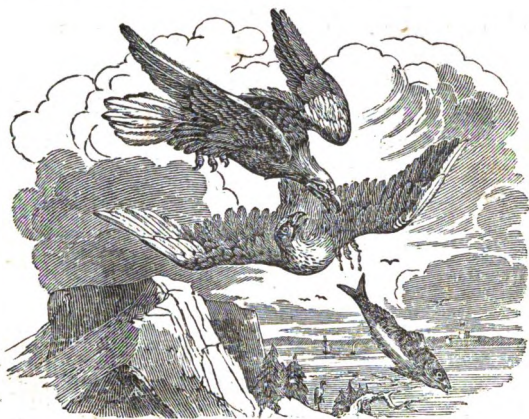
wild Hottentots who inhabit the mountains and deserts of South Africa, imbue the points of their arrows in a strong and subtle poison, and that the venom of the most dangerous serpents to be found in that country forms a principal ingredient in its composition. The boldness and dexterity displayed by these wild huntsmen, and by many also of the colonial Hottentots, in searching out and seizing alive the formidable Cobra-Capello and Puff-Adder, are truly astonishing. Still more surprising is it to witness the snake-hunter extracting from the yet living and writhing reptile, held fast by his naked foot planted on his neck, the little bag containing the secreted venom, which the rage of the animal injects into the wound made by its fangs at the moment it strikes its victim.

Now, my attentive little auditors, I will tell you stories about the Eagle, called the "king of birds."

This bird sits lonely and grand on the tops of the highest mountains, or soars up towards the sun until he appears to those who stand on the earth like a small mote in the sunbeam. He is proud, fierce, swift of wing, and fearless of all creatures, whether on earth or in the air. The eagle is the majestic symbol of our country's power—and his figure is proudly borne on our national flag as it floats over every sea.

The picture which I now show you is that

of the White Headed Eagle pouncing upon the Fish Hawk, and making him surrender the fish which he has just caught.



WHITE-HEADED EAGLE ATTACKING A FISH-HAWK.

Wilson, the ornithologist, says of the eagle:—

This bird has been long known to naturalists, being common to both continents, and occasionally met with from a very high northern latitude, to the borders of the torrid zone, but chiefly in the vicinity of the sea, and along the shores and cliffs of our lakes and large rivers. Formed by nature for braving the severest cold; feeding equally on the produce of the sea and of the land; possessing powers of flight capable of outstripping even the tempests themselves; unawed by any thing but man; and from the ethereal heights to which he soars, looking abroad, at one glance, on an immeasurable expanse of forests, fields, lakes, and ocean, deep below him, he appears indifferent to the little localities of change of seasons; as in a

few minutes he can pass from summer to winter, from the lower to the higher regions of the atmosphere, the abode of eternal cold, and from thence descend at will to the torrid or the arctic regions of the earth. He is therefore found at all seasons in the countries he inhabits, but prefers all such places as have been mentioned above, from the great partiality he has for fish.

In procuring these, he displays, in a very singular manner, the genius and energy of his character, which is fierce, contemplative, daring, and tyrannical ; attributes not exerted but on particular occasions ; but, when put forth, overpowering all opposition. Elevated on the high dead limb of some gigantic tree that commands a wide view of the neighboring shore and ocean, he seems calmly to contemplate the motions of the various feathered tribes that pursue their busy avocations below ; the snow-white gulls slowly winnowing the air ; the busy sandpipers coursing along the sands ; trains of ducks streaming over the surface ; silent and watchful cranes, intent and wading ; clamorous crows, and all the winged multitudes that subsist by the bounty of this vast liquid magazine of nature. High over all these, hovers one whose action instantly arrests all his attention. By his wide curvature of wing, and sudden suspension in air, he knows him to be the fish-hawk settling over some devoted victim of the deep. His eye kindles at the sight, and balancing himself, with half opened wings, on the branch, he watches the result. Down, rapid as an arrow from heaven, descends the distant object of his attention, the roar of its wings reaching the ear as it disappears in the deep, making the surge foam around. At this moment the eager looks of the eagle are all ardor ; and levelling his neck for flight, he sees the fish-hawk once more

emerge, struggling with his prey, and mounting in the air with screams of exultation. These are the signal for the eagle, who launching into the air, instantly gives chase, and soon gains on the fish-hawk; each exerts his utmost to mount above the other, displaying in the battle the most elegant evolutions. The fierce eagle rapidly advances, and is just on the point of reaching the hawk, when with a sudden scream, probably of despair, the latter drops his fish: the eagle, poisoning himself for a moment, as if to take a more certain aim, descends like a whirlwind, snatches it in his grasp before it reaches the water, and bears his ill-gotten booty silently away.

“Well, Uncle John, we think that this is a very mean way of getting a dinner. Why does not the bold, proud eagle get his meat in some more honest way?”

Oh, for that matter, he is about as honest as warriors and conquerors in general. The strong among them always seize upon the weak, and make them give up what little they have.

“Yes, Uncle, it is just so. Poland is the fish-hawk, and Russia the eagle.”

Rather say, my son, that Poland is the fish, which Russia snatches away from many destroyers, and is now eating up whole all alone.

We have talked quite enough this evening. Come again, all of you, another time.

I will bid you all *good night*, by repeating some noble lines written by one of our New-York poets, Mr. Halleck, about the American standard, in which he beautifully mentions the eagle :

“ Then from his mansion in the sun,
She called her eagle bearer down,
And gave into his mighty hand
The symbol of her chosen land.”

“ Majestic monarch of the cloud,
Who rear'st aloft thy regal form,
To hear the tempest trumping loud,
And see the lightning lances driven,
When stride the warriors of the storm,
And rolls the thunder-drum of heaven.
Child of the sun to thee 'tis given,
To guard the banner of the free,
To hover in the sulphur smoke,
To ward away the battle stroke,
And bid its blendings shine afar,
Like rainbows on the cloud of war,
The harbinger of victory !”

Good night all ! Happy sleep, and a good conscience to each one of you.

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